

P R E L U D E
TO THE
P L A Y S :
OR, *but e 14.*

A few Serious QUESTIONS
proposed to the Gentlemen, Ladies,
and others, that frequent the Play-
House;

Which they are desired to answer de-
liberately, to themselves, before they go
again to those Diversions.



L O N D O N :

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Gentlemen and Ladies, &c.

THE Design of these Questions, is by no Means to attempt to debar you from any necessary, seasonable, moderate, and lawful Recreations that God has allowed to Mankind.

Our holy Religion, so strict and pure as it is, does not forbid us the Pleasures of Life; but rather calls us to use them; that we may admire the Goodness of our Creator, and serve him chearfully; taking the more Pleasure in his Service, who has prepared a thousand Delights for us to charm the Ear, the Eye, the Taste, &c. Some Recreations, how common soever, are utterly unlawful; viz. Such as cannot be practised without Cruelty to the Creatures, or such as shut out necessary Business, or expose us to the Neglect of religious Duties in our Families; or incompose either Body or Mind for them. Recreations ought to be enga-

ged in with this View, that we may be the better fitted for Service to God and Man; therefore, whatever Recreations unfit for either, must be allowed to be sinful, whatever may be commonly pleaded for them.

It is very surprizing to think how some can spend a great Part of their Time in Recreations, and repeat them one Day after another, for several Weeks together. Est Modus in Rebus. Ne quid nimis. There is a Medium in all Things. Too much of one Thing is good for nothing. Suppose the Diversion to be never so good in it self, innocent and harmless; yet one would wonder how the Delight can hold! for we use to say, Voluptates commendat rarior usus; The more seldom Recreations are used, the more Delight and Pleasure they afford.

Gentlemen and Ladies, If the Vulgar, the Poor and Illiterate will break the Yoke, and burst the Bonds, it's Pity that such as you, to whom divine Providence has been more bountiful, on many Accounts, should set an Example of Evil, or that which has the Appearance of it, before your Inferiors;

Regis ad Exemplum totus componitur Orbis;

Inferiors very readily follow the Example of their Superiors.

I own, that what we have been long accustomed to, is very hard to break off from; Consuetudo altera Natura; Custom is second Nature. You have not only the Temptations of Satan

can working upon the Corruptions of Nature; but the strong Torrent of Example, both of High and Low, Learned and Unlearned; and how hard is it to sail aduerso Flumine Ventoque; Against Wind and Tide. To overcome all which, nothing will be sufficient, but the Grace of God, and a resolute Mind. If we are wise for our Souls, and for another World, we must not, Foro Uti, Conform to the Evils of the Times and Places wherein we live; but as our Bible directs us, save our selves from this untoward Generation.

Would it not be for the Profit of the Town in general, to discourage these idle Persons and Exercises? These occasion many to spend their Money, that can very ill spare it in their Families; besides, if we join their Loss of Time to the Money that they spend, it is probable that it might have kept the Family a whole Day: Is not this mischievous? And who is the better for it? It goes into the Pockets of them that have no Heart to use it, but abuse it on their Lusts. Perit quod non Labore partum; Light come, light go: Tho' not without Sin, both in getting and spending; Male parta, male perdita; Ill gotten, ill spent.

But what should these Persons do for a Livelihood? There are a thousand Ways for honest Men to get their Living without these, God has laid no Man under the Necessity of sinning to get his Bread. Let us remember that this whole World is a Stage, every Hour some are coming on, and others going off: Now is the
Time

[11]
Time to do our Part; by and by we shall be
called off. I must make my Exit, and never
appear more here, till the awful Trumpet of
the Arch-Angel sounds, to call me to receive my
final Sentence for Eternity. Shall we trifle
then, as now? O that will be a most serious
and awful Scene!



*A few Serious QUESTIONS
proposed to the Gentlemen and
Ladies, &c.*

 **C**AN this really be the End of human Life; such noble Creatures as God has made us? If this Way of living is agreeable to the Light of Nature; [I speak to Christians, that profess to make the Word of God their Rule of Faith and Practice.] Is this Life agreeable to divine Revelation? Does not Man debase himself by this Practice? Is not his Reason enslaved to his Senses? Are these really some of the chief Delights of human Life? O what has Sin done to our Nature? How has it blinded the Mind, corrupted the Judgment, and enslaved the Affections, that at present, carnal Pleasures seem to be the highest Happiness that some Men have to seek after. And the Wonder

der is yet greater, that Men of bright Parts, quick and penetrating Thought, Men of good Sense, and such as are called Christians too; should thus trifle away their Time in such sort of Recreations as are more fit for Heathens and Pagans, than for those that have their Lot cast in a Christian Land.

Q. Do you indeed think, that this is the best Improvement you can make, or ought to make of the Talent of your precious Time? Do you herein comply with; or rather cross that Charge of God to all that bear the Christian Name; *Redeem the Time, because the Days wherein we live are evil.*

Is this Way of living, really the Way to make evil Times better? Will not your Example strengthen the Hands of Evil-doers? Is there no Harm in wasting away so much precious Time; which you will wish hereafter you had improved another Way? When any come to die, and look on their Soul's Affairs very doubtful: How much *Money* would they give to redeem, and call back a *few Days* of their Time, which they have trifled away: But ill spent Time is lost and cannot be recalled: The Loss of Time, at last, will be found to be the greatest Loss. And yet,

*Ploratur Lachrymis amissa Pecunia veris,
Non Tempora; ———*

Men bewail the Loss of their Money, but not the Loss of their more valuable Time,

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Q. Is this to be *so doing*, as our great Lord and Master, Jesus Christ, hath given us in Charge? We call our selves Christians, and Disciples and Followers of Christ; but did you ever read, that the Lord Jesus Christ, or his *Disciples indeed*, spent their Time in such Exercises as these? They rather met together for Prayer and Christian Conference, for each others Edification in Faith and Holiness, and to encourage one another to Love and good Works.

Q. Would you be willing that the Lord Jesus Christ should come and find you *so doing*? In such Company? At such an Exercise? Do you think the Lord Jesus Christ would say to you, *Well done good and faithful Servant*? Is this Service for Christ, or Service done for another Master? Is this the Way for you to give up your Accounts with Joy and not with Grief?

Q. Is this any Part of that Self-Denial, that our holy Religion calls for, from all its Professors; and that true Christians should exercise, while they live in a World of Temptations and Snares? Is this to shine as Lights in the World, in the Midst of a crooked and perverse Generation? *Est Virtus abstinuisse a placidis*. That's Virtue, to deny our selves of that which the Flesh might plead for.

Q. Can such a vain Life, indeed, be an Answer of that Charge of God, to all under the Gospel; *Abstain from all Appearance of Evil*? Surely you will readily acknowledge,

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knowledge, that there is at least an Appearance of Evil in it ; for there is much Vanity, and nothing serious, Virtue exposed, and Vice applauded ! Does corrupt Nature need such Helps as these ! Here are Oaths, and drolling at sacred Things ; ridiculing serious Religion, and Men of unblemished Lives. But if you see no Evil in all this, the greater is your Danger.

Quâ Flumen placidum est, forsan latet altius
[unda.

Some Heathens will be Witnesses against some that bear the Christian Name, yet betray their Lord and his Cause by a vain Life. *Turpia fuge* ; Abstain from all that is evil.

Q. Is this Practice a good Preparation for our lying down in the Grave, or on a sick Bed, with Quiet and Ease of Mind and Conscience ? Will you not wish for this Time again, or that it had been spent better ? We have heard dying Persons thus lamenting ; O that I had spent more Time in Search of the Word of God, and in my Closet in Prayer, and examining my Heart and Life. It would be very strange indeed, if any of us who call our selves Christians, should take no Time at all to think of our Souls, and of the World to come ! But when shall I begin to be serious ? God calls for this in our Youth : If that Season is past with me, is it not high Time now to begin ? The Night of Death is hastening up-
on

on us, wherein no Work can be done, to prepare for Eternity.

Dum orimur, morimur;

We haste to Death, with every Breath.

And whether we are ready or unready, there is no bribing or charming the King of Terrors.

Mors rapuit Juvenes, sustulit illa Senes.

Both Young and Old must yield,
When Death once takes the Field.

Q. When you are going to these Places of Recreation, do you ask the Presence of God with you? If not, do you not throw your selves in the Way of Temptation? Are you able to keep your selves? Every sensual Delight and Pleasure of this World has some Snare, some Poison in it: Every Sweet has its Bitter; every Drop of Honey attended with its Sting; every Bait, tho' gay and pleasant, has its Hook; and every Place of Recreation has its Dangers. But if you pray before you go, that God would go with you, or that your Recreation may fit you for the Service of God, consider well, whether this is indeed the best Means to be used in order to obtain that good End.

Q. When you spend so many Hours in those pleasing Diversions; how many Hours did you

spend with God, with good Books, and in Prayer and Meditation that Day? Three or four Hours, you think, quickly pass away at the Play-House; would you not be uneasy if the Exercise was commonly so long at Church? You hurry to the Play-House, as if you were afraid you should be too late, or for fear you should lose any Part of the Diversion; and could even wish, the Exercises had held longer; is it so with you in the Service of God? Or rather, are you ready to say, *What a Weariness is it!* Whence is it, that such Multitudes, Rich and Poor, Young and Old, flock to these Places of Diversion, and also call and invite their Acquaintance to go with them? And whence is it, that these Exercises are followed almost every Night, for many Weeks together? Would you do so if a good Sermon was to be preached so often? Would you crowd so to hear the Word of God; or to pray for Grace? Or if you were to pay for your Seats at Church every Time, and be kept there three or four Hours, would you not have your Excuses why you could not go? But, O strange, such a silly Play as the *Beggars Opera* should be acted forty or fifty Times over, with Applause, in one Season! A godly Sermon is not so treated by many. O how vain is the Mind, and how captivated the Affections of Man by the Fall! And how much has divine Power and Grace to do, in order to bring Man to himself, and to his God, and his Duty!

Q. Is this, indeed, the Way to learn to be virtuous? I know it is pretended, that the Design of Plays is, first to shew Men their Vices, and then to mend them. But is this God's appointed Way to reform Men of what is amiss in Word or Conversation? Is making Sport of other Men's Sins the Way to make others out of Love with them? O how deceitful and wicked is the Heart! Can we suppose that the Actors themselves have any such Views? Are not their Designs rather, to gratify the Curiosity of the Weakest; and to get your Money into their Pockets? Can these Men, who are not of the best Lives, but very corrupt both in Word and Conversation, be thought proper Persons to attempt the Reformation of others? Did you ever hear of any vitious Person that was reformed by attending the Play-Houses? No, no, they are rather made more vain and loose in their Speech and Life. But if we might allow for once, that their true Design was to amend you, it will follow, that they look on you as worse than themselves. *Verbum sat sapienti*: He that hath Ears to hear let him hear.

Q. Do not these Actors, in attempting to expose the Vices of others; condemn themselves; according to the Proverb, *Clodius accusat Marchos*; Satan rebukes Sin when it will serve his own Turn? Ought not such Persons first to mend themselves, before they pretend to reform others? We may well say to them, *Medice, curre te ipsum*: Physician, heal thy self. First cast out the Beam out of thine own Eye; *Censor omni*

omni careat Peccato ; He that reproveth another, should not be guilty of the same Fault himself. But the Thing is manifest and admits of no Dispute, they never design the Reformation of Men's Manners; they never desire to see you better than you are; for they are well assured, that as fast as Men grow wiser and better, and shall see into the Evil of their Practice; their Auditory, of Course, would fall off from them, which they never desire. If there is nothing of true Piety, or real Religion in these Persons, can we reasonably expect any good from them? Are not these some of the very Persons that *spend their Days in Mirth*, tho' they must go *down to the Dead* in a little while; yet they say to God, *depart from us, we desire not the Knowledge of his Ways.*

Q. Do you your selves, in going to these Diversions, to hear others Vices exposed, really design, that your Hearts and Lives may become better? Or rather, do you not make your selves merry at others Faults? You don't commit those Crimes, but you laugh at them; is not that Evil? Our Bible tells us, that *they are Fools that make a Mock of Sin.* Is Sin to be jested with? Is not God dishonoured by it; and his holy Laws broken? Has not Sin ruined the whole human Race? Is that to be made a Jest of, which has kindled the Flames of Hell? And that which has chained down the Angels that fell, under Darkness for ever? Is Sin to be made Sport of, when it is that which fills miserable Souls with weeping, and wailing, and gnash-

gnashing of Teeth? We have more need to weep over the sad Effects of Sin, on our own Souls and others. So the best of Men have done; *Rivers of Water run down mine Eyes, because Men make void thy Law. I beheld the Transgressors and was grieved.* He did not make himself merry with them. O how different is the Working of Grace from the Working of corrupt Nature!

That Exercise which only exposes the Vices of Men, and is not intended to reform them, is an Invention of Satan, and not of God's Appointment. If the Sins of the covetous Man, or of the Prodigal, are set forth by them in their lively Pictures, it is done to make the Auditory merry with the Humours of these Sinners. And is it not a Sin to sit and laugh at those Sins whereby many make haste to Hell? Or when they act the Fool, or the Mad-Man; is not that very sinful, to make Sport with others Miseries? It is the Pleasure of God to deprive them of their Reason; and it might have been the Case of one of our nearest Relations; should we make Sport of it then! Should we not rather bless God, that it is neither your Case, or the Condition of any of your near Relatives? But can this Way of making Sport of others Afflictions, be the best Way to make you thankful? *Solomon* said of [such] *Laughter, it is mad, and of [such] Folly, what doth it;* What good can it do? Yea, what Mischief doth it both to our selves and others?

Q. Is it not wicked to introduce Satan and his Temptations, into their Plays? Are the Devil and his Temptations Matter of Jest and Merriment? When *the Devil our Adversary, goeth about as a roaring Lion, seeking whom he may devour.* The most serious Things, Death and Hell, do not escape their profane Notice. *Hocine Seclum!* O what Profaneness is here! When every Thought of these Things, should strike Seriousness into the Hearts of Men; and they will do so into all wise Men. Some of the Actors call themselves his Majesty's Servants: But whose Servants they are that do these Works of Darkness, I think is very easy to determine, by the Word of God; *His Servants ye are, whom ye obey.* They expose the Faults of others, and do the same themselves. *Thou that judgest another, condemnest thy self: Thinkest thou, O Man, that doest the same Things, that thou shalt escape the Judgment of God.*

Q. Is this Way of carnal Pleasure, really, that *narrow Way that leadeth to Life; which few, comparatively, are said to find?* Or is it *the broad Way that leadeth to Destruction?* For, if you observe it; Our Lord saith, that *there be many that go in thereat.* Now, pray be so just to your selves as to observe, what an Answer is here ready for you; while you plead [and hug and comfort your selves with that mighty Argument] that a *great many others do so as well as I.* The

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Greatest, the Wisest, and Men of Learning, and sober, virtuous Persons too. But this is no Part of their Virtue or Goodness. We are charged not to follow a Multitude to do Evil. Surely Christians ought to walk by Rule; and our Rule is not what *others* do, but what *God would have us do*. The Word of God, and Example of Christ, and the Cloud of Witnesses, are to be followed by us; or else let us call ourselves by some other Name, not Christians: for our Lord will say of such, *I know you not, depart from me, ye Workers of Iniquity*.

Q. You know that God has charged us to *train up our Children in the Way that they should go*; but can this be the Way that God approves of, and that he intended in that Charge? Can this be the Childrens Way to Heaven? Should our Children be suffer'd [not to say encouraged] to trifle away the best of their Time thus? Should our Youth be so poyson'd with Vice? Will they not carry a Tang of it thro' every Relation after?

Quo semel est imbuta recens servabit odorem.

Our poor Children have no need of such Teaching and Examples: *Dociles imitandis turpibus praves omnes sumus*: Being depraved by the Fall, they and we are too ready to learn and retain any Thing that is Evil. There is no need, *Oleum addere Camino*, to throw Oyl into the Fire of their natural Lusts; but rather to strive to quench it. An hundred Sorts of

Diversions might be found out for them better than these.

Q. Have you had no Checks of Conscience after you have spent so much Time at the Play, and left little or none for the Service of God and your Soul? *Post Gaudia Luctus*; After Sweet-Meats, sometimes, Sour-Sauce. If so, will you venture again, like the Fly to the Candle, or the Horse to the Battle? Shall I do Violence to my own Conscience *Ruere, per vetitum nefas*? Rather should I not watch and pray, that I enter not into Temptation? But if you never perceived Conscience doing this needful Office, then, does not the *strong Man armed* keep the Palace in Peace? But I am persuaded that some of you even with your selves disintangled from your old Customs and Companions; like the Poet,

*Video Meliora proboque, deteriora
Sequor.*

I see I am wrong, I know I am out of the Way: What shall I do? Seek to please God rather than Men: Nay, but the best way to please the wisest and best of Men, is in all things, to seek to please God. *Errare est Hominis, sed non persistere*: Fallen Man is prone to Sin, but a wise Man will not continue in an Evil Way, when he is convinced of the Evil of it. Those that are wise will keep Company with those that are good; for,

Noscitur ex socio, qui non cognoscitur ex se.

The

The Company any one chuses, and most delights in, will shew what the Man himself is.

Q. Will this merry Life hold always? What will be the End hereof? *Conitum Principium, finis Tragicum*. This conical Life is like to end in a dreadful Tragedy. *Facilis descensus avernio*. The Way to Hell is all down Hill. The Bee may be drowned in its own Honey; So may we in immoderate Pleasures of this Life. *She that lieth in Pleasure, is dead while she liveth*. It is good to be merry and wise. The most solid and lasting Joy arises from the Knowledge of the Pardon of our Sins, and our Relation to God in Christ, by Faith, and our Title unto eternal Life. Joy and Peace in believing: This is what the World can neither give or take away.

Q. Do you consider well what you do, when you commend these Actors for performing their Parts, as you call, well? Has it been done without Sin? Are they dextrous at their Business, then, are they not the more worthy of Blame? For a Man had better be a Bungler than an Artist at Sinning. Is it just Matter of Praise, that one Man can ape another, especially in any Thing that is evil? Is a Man to be commended for speaking or acting of Folly? For they are Fools, in God's Account, that make a Mock of Sin. A Man had better do nothing than do that which is evil: *Praestat nihil facere, quam malefacere*.

Q. Could you never think that there was a Rebuke of divine Providence upon those that

attended these Plays, when in *Ipswich*, and other Places, their Building fell down, to the Hurt of many, and the Fright of many more? Or the burning so many at *Burwell*; Shall we attribute these to Luck and Fortune, or meer Chance? Is there not a God that judgeth in the Earth? Is there any Thing that comes to pass without his Providence; and does he any Thing in vain? And is there not a Cause when the Judgments of God are abroad in the Earth? And shall not the Judge of all the Earth do right? Tho' he is infinite in his Patience, yet is he not a jealous God, hating Iniquity? O what an awful Stroke of divine Sovereignty was that at *Burwell*, where the Persons perished in the very Act! And how soon was their vain Laughter turned into Mourning! And what a Stroke was it to Relations; when three, four, or five were dead out of one House? And was not their Death in such a Way the more afflictive to surviving Relations; as it was surprizing to themselves? God does not *willingly afflict or grieve the Children of Men*: His Judgments are *his strange Work*. But then, he expects we should take Notice what he does, and hear his Voice in his Judgments on others; and what is the Voice of God, but this, *for no more lest a worse Thing come unto you*. Your Warning was much more favourable; but if that is not duly regarded; another more fatal may be sent; or, which is worse, God may say, *Let them alone; why should ye be stricken any more? Ye will revolt more and more*. Now and then,
God

God shews his Displeasure against Sinners; tho' he does not stir up all his Wrath, and execute Vengeance speedily; but is long-suffering, giving to Men a Space of Repentance.

*Si quoties peccant Homines, sua Fulmina mittat
Jupiter, exiguo Tempore inermis erit.*

If full as oft as Men offend,
Jove's Thunder-bolts should on them light,
He quickly would want Bolts to send;
Or rather have no Men to smite.

Q. Do not such vain Exercises, especially at this Time, very much cross the Providence of God, in the Afflictions of our Protestant Brethren abroad; who are suffering Persecution under the Power and Oppression of their Enemies? While they are mourning for the Ark of God, and because the Glory is departed from them, where is our Sympathy with the Body of Christ? We have need enough to weep for our selves, if we duly consider our Circumstances in Religion: We have the Name and Form, but where are the Life and Power! When the Providence of God calls for Mourning, then to be making merry, is such a provoking Sin, that God has said, *shall never be purged away from you 'till ye die.* We ought to be afflicted for the Afflictions of Joseph, i. e. for our Protestant Brethren, that are deprived of the Ordinances of the Gospel: And does not this trifling Profession, we make of Religion,

endanger our Loss also of the same Privileges? The Life and Power of Religion are gone already, and we may well think, that were it not the Fashion of the Day and Place we live in, another Religion would serve many about us, or rather none at all; for Religion does not yield them half the Pleasure of one Evening's Diversion in the Play-House. How differing from the Spirit of holy *David*, and of all gracious Souls, *One Day in thy Courts is better than a thousand spent in Places of Vanity and Sin.*

Q. When you have come from these idle Recreations; do you never ask your selves, *Cui Boni*, Where is the Profit of all this Stuff? What am I the better for all this? *Exitus actus probat*; All is well that ends well. How will this wind up at last? Mine Eyes and Ears have been gratified, but has my Soul received any real Advantage thereby? Has not this been lost Time? Is not my Mind more vain? Was I not more unfit for Prayer, and other Duties of Religion? Was I not forced to hurry over for Want of Time; or rather, to omit them that Night, and go to Bed without commending my self into the Hands of God? Or, did I not think of some of the Words and Gestures of the Actors, while I said my Prayers? Is there no evil in all this? Can't you see a Snare of the Devil, in hindering you from, or interrupting you in better Things? Instead of indulging our selves in any Thing that would occasion sinful Distractions in Duty, we should watch and pray against them, as *David* did, *Unite my Heart to fear thy Name.*

If after all this, *Surdo Cano*, a deaf Ear is turned to what has been here proposed; I have no worse Treatment than our Lord Jesus Christ, and his Prophets and Apostles have met with before. Nay, should I for this, with *David*, be *made the Song of the Drunkard*; or be treated with Ridicule, *Quibus nec Ara, nec Fides*, by Men who have neither Faith nor good Manners; we are well prepared to meet such with our Pity and Prayers. We expect no better from some poor Creatures, who, tho' they can paint the Faults of others to the Life, have no Eyes to see their own. Be that as it will, I leave both this and them with God and his Providence: Yet I hope that these few Hints will meet with some that are better disposed to hearken to any Thing that is sincerely intended for their Good; not given to cavil and carp at Words, but desirous to know and do their Duty. It is to such I send these few Lines; and I send them in Hope, and commit them to the Blessing of Heaven.

If this short Attempt shall be found serviceable to any, in bringing them to a more close Consideration of themselves, and their Ways; and every where to act as under the all-seeing Eye of God, I and they shall have occasion for a more refined Joy, than can be extracted from the seeming Pleasures of this Life. Which God of his infinite Mercy grant, for the sake of Jesus Christ, to whom be Glory for ever. *Amen.*

F I N I S

It shall be all this, I have said, a dear-
friend to what has been proposed; I have
no words of treatment than our Lord Jesus Christ
and his Prophets and Apostles have met with
before. I should I for this, with Ysaiah
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say ye will be as the Jews, and will be
by men who have neither faith nor good man-
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Yours &c